"To pile like Thunder":

The Advantages of Reading Emily Dickinson's Poetry from a Cognitive Perspective

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Introduction

When we write or read a poem, we are automatically using our cognitive capabilities. By "cognitive," we don't just mean our conceptual reasoning powers. As cognitive researchers now understand embodied cognition, the sensory, motor, and emotive faculties that underlie our functioning as human beings both constrain and enable our reasoning and understanding. In addition, our knowledge of language, our own experiences, and any cultural or historical knowledge we have from our individual memories constitute the cognitive frameworks from which we articulate our thoughts and respond to those of others. As a result, when we encounter a poem, multiple possibilities for interpretation arise, especially when a poem is complex or puzzling.

A cognitive approach therefore does not simply offer yet another possible interpretation to a poem among the many already proposed. By opening up and clarifying the cognitive workings undertaken by both poet and reader, it can, we claim, provide a more robust reading that illuminates rather than simply controverts other interpretations. In other words, a cognitive approach provides a "prototypical" reading that enables other readings to fall within the category of possible readings and also indicates when a reading may fall outside that category (Lakoff 58ff). Reading cognitively can thus reveal why alternative readings are possible and how these are arrived at, as well as indicating what might be preferred readings, depending on how inherent ambiguities in the poem are resolved and why they might be preferred, or where an interpretation may have gone wrong. Reading cognitively thus provides a robust test for literary and linguistic frameworks. Are there

readings that the frameworks find difficult to reconcile? Does a cognitive approach indicate some change to the frameworks is needed in certain situations?

While all readings are of course cognitive in the broadest sense, the scope of a specifically cognitive approach encompasses all elements in a poem. These include not just word meaning and sentence structure, but prosodic effects—its macro structure, its rhythms, sounds, repetitive patternings, capitalization, line breaks, and so on—that provide an affective experience for both poet and reader. A cognitive reading considers contexts, including other poems in a poet's corpus as well as their relation to poetic genre, history, culture, and contemporary events. It explores the interrelationships of a poem's images, its metaphors, and its affects that are motivated by subliminal sensory-motor-emotive processes employed by both poet and reader. A cognitive analysis makes explicit how and why a poem as perceived by the reader is doing what it is doing in simulating reality. Rather than providing yet another literary interpretation of a poet's œuvre, reading cognitively both opens up and constrains the possibilities of a poetic text.

In this paper, we focus primarily on the *how* and the *why* of a poem's presentation in addition to the *what*. We look briefly at how prosodic elements can shape a poem's structural and sound patterns in relation to its theme. In particular, we apply Fauconnier and Turner's conceptual integration network theory, informally known as "blending," that opens up the cognitive processes that occur during the reading of a poem. Blending describes the mental activity that creates new meaning from old information through mappings and projections from various "mental spaces" into a new, blended space with emergent structure. It is therefore a theory that illuminates metaphor creation: not as a simple mapping between the two domains of vehicle (source) and tenor (target) as in traditional metaphor theory, but a process that creates new meaning.

A blend is a dynamic activity that involves four mental spaces: a generic space, two input spaces, and a blended space that is projected from the input spaces. When applied to metaphor, the two input spaces can be thought of as mental representations of the presentation (vehicle or source) space and reference (tenor or target) space.[1] The generic space abstracts structural similarities between the presentation and reference spaces that trigger projections from the input spaces to the blend. The blend space represents the emerging of a new formulation from the input spaces to create a mental representation of the metaphor (Fauconnier and Turner 39ff).

The advantage of this way of thinking about metaphor is that it offers a means of explicit analytical clarity to show "how" we cognitively approach this process and offers a clear vocabulary with which to express it. Secondly, it foregrounds the fluid nature of the process by recognizing that a blend must be "run" like a computer program in order to create emergent structure that does not exist in either of the originating input spaces. This is analogous to the realization that new connections can emerge through metaphoric expression, and that we can use metaphor to show us new and surprising aspects of the target we are describing by means of the source. Similarly, it can account for tensions in the blend (and the tension of the metaphor) by making explicit what mappings are not brought across from one input space to the other and what structures are not mapped into the blend space. It can focus on single metaphors or on the gestalt of a poem as a whole, attempting to capture its fluidity of movement and revelation. A reader might experience a number of possible readings through different ways of mapping but settle on a "preferred" one, depending on the extent to which contextual cues are activated cognitively as opposed to others that might be not fully crystalized or at odds with other features such as historical context or prosodic elements.

Blending theory can thus account in a robust and analytically replicable way for 1) emergent meaning as the projections progress and 2) changes in meaning, alternate meanings, or readings. Part of the cognitive approach we adopt here is to acknowledge and try to clarify why one reading may take more hold in certain circumstances, as well as to offer potential new readings. Analyses that focus on specific elements rather than on the poem as a whole can only partially comprehend the way it is working. The following sections thus deal with approaching a poem as a complex unity and its consequent emotive effects, not as a consequence of a critical or ideological approach, but as a consequence of cognition itself. While not a complete analysis, the final section clarifies how a cognitive approach can explain how literary and linguistic analyses may fit into a coherent whole that resolves some of the seemingly contradictory readings.

In what follows, we explore one Dickinson poem with respect to the contribution literary and linguistic analyses make to readers' initial responses. Dickinson's poetry is especially interesting from a cognitive perspective because of the poet's fluidity of composition: the multiple copies of a poem with varying format and wording and the variants to words and phrases of a poem given in the manuscripts. By not overseeing her poems into print, it is as though Dickinson were indeed attempting to capture the fleeting evanescence of poetry that is the subject of the poem under consideration here.

We chose Emily Dickinson's poem, *To pile like Thunder to it's close*,[2] because it is not easy to understand and has been the subject of intensive linguistic analysis, initially by Cristanne Miller (1987) and more recently by a group of linguists at Tübingen University (Bauer, Beck, et al.).[3] The multi-year project undertaken by the linguists at Tübingen (TL) was designed to explore the interactive relations between linguistics and literature. In their 2020 publication, they use a selection of Emily Dickinson's poems, including *To pile like Thunder to it's close*, as their case study. In

addition to researching what literary critics have written about the poem, we also asked some

members of the Emily Dickinson Reading Circle (EDRC) to give us their readings.[4] All read the poem

in its edited editions, as follows:

> To pile like Thunder to it's close
>
> Then crumble grand away
>
> While everything created hid
>
> This - would be Poetry -
>
>
> Or Love - the two coeval come -
>
> We both and neither prove -
>
> Experience either and consume -
>
> For none see God and live -

<div align="center">(H364, Fr1353/J1247/M 713)</div>

Characteristic of Dickinson's two-stanza format , the first stanza lays out an event or situation only

to be elaborated in the last by complicated syntax. Although the first stanza is fairly

understandable, the last takes the reader into puzzling territory.

Literary readings

Literary critics who have commented on the poem tend to encapsulate their reading in

terms of their understanding of such Dickinsonian concepts as "circumference" or the poet's

attitude toward her vocation (e.g., Thundyil, J. Miller). Richard Sewall focuses on the line "We

both and neither prove - ":

That is, try? test enough? and hence know love and poetry only slightly? But to know

them fully is to experience the ultimate epiphany—like a confrontation with God in

"death." Hence (another poem) the "Truth" must be told "slant"; it must "dazzle

gradually / Or every man be blind -." (723)

Helen Vendler, linking the poem with *I saw no Way - The Heavens were stitched -* (H90,

Fr633/J378/M 320), cites the poem as an example of Dickinson as "the agent of her own

enlightenment….But one can see Circumference and live—at the cost of remaining alone,

unreachable by others." (277).

EDRC readers who encountered the poem for the first time raised the same problematic

aspects that bedevil immediate understanding, such as the line "We both and neither prove - ", and

the Biblical quotation in the final line, "For none see God and live - ".[5] Being somewhat familiar

with Dickinson's poetry, they were uncomfortable with the idea that experiencing poetry will kill

us. That is not Dickinsonian. Most comments dealt with various interpretations of the relation

between poetry and love on the one hand and poetry/love with thunder and God on the other. The

discussion included the following points:

- identification of the Biblical passage on Moses coming face to face with God (Exodus

  33:20) and Dickinson's comment on it elsewhere;

- ambiguity of the verb *prove* as meaning either "confirm" or "test";

- the verb *consume* understood in its transitive sense (presumably in order to avoid the

  intransitive sense of wasting away and dying);

- indication in the thunder metaphor of the presence of lightning as an unnamed player;

- the Dickinsonian idea of secrets and hiding, as in the poem *Nature and God - I neither*

  knew (A91-3/4, Fr803/J835/M 432).

These literary analyses capture aspects that we will show to be cognitively coherent in the way the poem is working, by exploring the *how* of meaning making, as well as the *what*, and in some cases offering new readings that show how other readings can emerge, and how competing readings can be entertained and compared. As our cognitive approach will show, it also raises possible explanations for *why* the poem is doing what it is doing.

Linguistic readings

Cristanne Miller (1987) was the first Dickinsonian critic to explore the poem's grammar in depth. Focusing on the poem's structural ambiguities, she makes the following points:

On the uninflected form of "consume": "There is no simple way to integrate that sense of responsibility [i.e. from passive to active] for the action of consuming easily into the rest of the poem. Thus the verb's ambiguous form leaves the effect of poetry and love uncertain." (69). Attempts to provide direct objects for transitive verbs even when used intransitively tend "to lead the reader to extreme interpretations" (71).

On poetic structure: "words of relation [six conjunctions out of eight lines] dominate the structure of the poem more clearly than verbs do because of their line initial position….The only idea-carrying or thematic word beginning a line is the verb 'Experience,' as a warning or command. On the right-hand margin, however, we find: hid, come, prove, consume, live" (86).

On use of the copula as conditional: "Dickinson's definition of poetry qualifies its primary (copular) assertion through temporal adverbs and the conditional voice," with "the result remain[ing] uncertain" (97).

Miller then moves from factual observations to the following conclusions:

On definition by negation or contrast: "It is as though the speaker's sudden realization that poetry and love are analogous causes her to stumble momentarily in her definition, and then to conclude far from the crescendoing description with which she began" (100). "Her pattern of repeated negative assertion suggests that the poet's attention is most captivated by the things and moments of her life that can be known only indirectly or through multiple, competing perceptions" (101).

On the poet as agent: "[T]he poet imagines herself as the entire event: she is not the thunder wielder or bolt or struck object but the act of thunder piling and crumbling while 'Everything created' responds. She imagines what it would be like if she *were* the act of poetry, or love, or God" (127). "[T]his poet does not own the power she wields. Creation is as devastating to her as to anyone else" (128).

Final interpretation of entire poem: "Perhaps in this poem's analogies Dickinson reveals more clearly than in any other poem the role of creativity in her own life. To be a poet is to love in a kind of absolute way—not to choose a partner or object for reciprocal involvement but to express love fiercely, to cherish the world through power. It is, furthermore, to participate in the divine. The poet does not become God, but the gift of her art is indistinguishable from the revelation of divinity. Although the world has long separated God from poetry, for Dickinson there is no separating poetry from the experience of God. In a sense, poetry provides her access to and her expression of both love and religion" (130).

Building on Miller's structural ambiguities, TL explores the poem's lexical ambiguities, concluding that the poem confronts underspecified lexical meanings and a logical riddle. In particular, they address the problems raised by other readers as follows:[6]

- *would* in "This - would be Poetry - / Or Love - " indicates that the sentence is a counterfactual conditional, thus presupposing a false antecedent; it does not relate other possible worlds to the actual world, but to the text world (18);

- the use of *or* in "Poetry - / Or Love - " can be inclusive or exclusive, with inclusive allowing for the possibility of both options [or/and] (19-20);

- the apparent paradox in "We both and neither prove - " is resolved by seeing *prove* as an example of zeugma (the use of a word with different meaning within the same sentence), emphasizing the double meaning of *prove* as logical reasoning and empirical evidence; that is: "1) We prove both poetry and love with logical argumentation, but are ourselves proof of neither poetry nor love; or 2) We are proof of both poetry and love, but prove neither poetry nor love with logical argumentation. The passage does not suggest which of the two readings is preferable." (20-22);

- the experience of fully understanding poetry or love is equated with seeing God, so that to do so we would have to perish (22).

Following their analysis, TL concludes:

Semantic paraphrase: "Poetry and love are like natural phenomena comparable to thunder. Both are equivalent in their value, as they are contemporaries to each other. By experiencing both, we are living proof of their existence. At the same time, we cannot prove their existence in their complexity by providing evidence because if we experienced both in their entirety, we would perish. This is parallel to seeing God, since no one may see God and survive" (23).

Pragmatic paraphrase: "If everything the text says is true, then humankind has only access to a subpart of the essence of poetry and love and they are the basis of our existence at the

same time." Thus, both poetry and love are "phenomena beyond human comprehension and both are essential to humankind" (24).

Miller and TL's readings explore the various possibilities of the poem's syntax and semantics to probe more deeply into literary analyses and illuminate what the poem might be saying about the role of the poet (Miller) or the effect of poetry (TL). Their summary interpretations go beyond grammar to focus on what Dickinson might be saying about the relations between poetry, love, and God. In what follows, we show how a cognitive approach can clarify the move from grammar to interpretation by exploring how the poem is working and suggesting why it is doing what it does.

Prosodic Effect

From a cognitive perspective, we are embodied beings. The literary and linguistic readings of Dickinson's poem occur at the conceptual level of communication, focusing on what the poem means through the categories of structure (syntax), sense (semantics), and sound (prosody). Embodied cognition focuses on the whole person, the proprioceptive features of sensory perception, visceral and kinesic aspects of movement, and emotive forces that enable and constrain conceptual awareness. These sensory, motor, and emotive affects both subliminally motivate the poet and are felt in the reader through the poem's prosody.

With Dickinson's poems edited in their published form, it is difficult to discern the sensory-motor-emotive affects that result from reading the original manuscripts, in addition to the way visual presentation can influence interpretation. In its extant manuscript form, the poem appears on two pages as follows:

[insert Figure 1 here]

Figure 1. Manuscript for "To pile like Thunder to it's close"

(courtesy of the Houghton Library, Harvard University)

The manuscript's line breaks reveal a pattern obscured by the regularization to two four-line stanzas in the printed editions. At the macrostructure level, the entire poem consists of four sentences of varying lengths that link the two stanzas together. The forms of the sentences parallel the movement of the poem, both in repetition and placement of conjunctions and verbs, as Miller has noted.

The first sentence is the longest, occupying ten lines and stretching across a stanza break. This sentence constitutes the association of thunder with poetry and love and iconically simulates the accumulation of piling (in both its figurative and intransitive senses) to prolong and intensify to a climax when lightning and thunder occur together immediately overhead.[7] The line breaks compound this effect by creating lines of two or three words that accumulate on top of each other. The following three sentences in their shorter appearances iconically simulate the sound of thunder as it (c)rumbles in moving "grand away" from the "crack" of lightning. These parallel relations are replicated by different strategies that link the two stanzas together. The *then* and *or* conjunctions of the first sentence introduce subsequent expansions in chiasmic (::) relation, with the sentences in the second stanza adding reasons for the former:[8]

<u>Then</u> crumble grand away :: We both and neither prove;

<u>or</u> Love :: the two coeval come.

The effect is to introduce the notions that 1) we cannot apprehend poetry and love any more than we can capture thunder as it moves away, and 2) poetry and love come like thunder from the same originating source. In addition, the first and last sentences parallel each other through the

relational conjunctions of *while* and *for*. That is, the two clauses refer to the same event, the

second explaining the reason for the first:

> *While* everything created hid
>
> *For* none see God and live.

The effect of this relation is to enclose poetry and love within a frame that links thunder to God,

thus finally revealing the ultimate revelation of what the poem is doing, as we shall see. The

repetitions of sound create a patterned movement from predominantly unvoiced consonants in

the first to voiced consonants in the second.

It is beyond the scope and limits of this paper to provide a complete description of the

affective sounds that, in choral composer Alice Parker's words, weave a dense fabric in the poem:

"that spider-web of echoes which are rather like a hidden skeleton which tie the lines together"

(personal correspondence). We have already noted the sound effects of thunder as it approaches

and recedes. The following may give a sense of how prosodic effects link and draw together the

crucial themes of the poem. For instance, the unvoiced/voiced consonant pairs (t/d, k/g, p/b, s/z,

f/v, th/th) create a significant pattern across the two stanzas.[9] In the first stanza, unvoiced

consonants dominate; in the second, voiced consonants do. This means that when voiced

consonants appear in the first and unvoiced in the second, they link with those in the opposing

stanza. In the first stanza [d] occurs first in the word *thunder* with its extra stress emphasis and the

thud of [də]. It then repeats at the end of the words *grand, created, hid*, *would*. The sole voiced

equivalent [g] for the frequent use of [k] falls at the beginning of the word *grand*. In the second

stanza, [g] and [d] disappear entirely (except for the [d] on *and*) until the final line when they

reappear with the word *God*, thus linking through the [g]-[d] sound the idea of none seeing "God"

with thunder moving "grand" away.

In the first stanza, the rhyme scheme contrasts closed endings (*close*, *hid)* that describe the action of thunder and its effect with open endings (*away*, *poetry)* that indicate the possibility of transcendence, a "moving beyond." In the second stanza, the opening "Love" and closing "live" frame a subtle scheme of alliteration and assonance that ties the sentences together: *love/come*, *love/prove*, *come/consume*, *prove/live*. The effect is a focus on love and life that reinforces the metaphoric world portrayed.

The capitalized word *This* on the same line as *would*, with a horizontal mark separating them from each other, creates two effects. First, it breaks the continuity of what would be normal sentence structure (*to pile…would be…*). Second, it creates an emphasis that makes one consider that the normal demonstrative pronoun in this context would have been *that*.[10] Why did Dickinson choose "This"? It not only brings the image of the thunder's actions deictically closer to the reality space of the speaker as poet, thus identifying the agency of both, it also indexically points to the poem itself as a candidate for the possibility of fulfilling the purpose of poetry.

TL discusses the modal *would* as a counterfactual conditional, so that poetry and love would be like the natural phenomenon of thunder but aren't. What is not considered is the possibility that it is rather a hypothetical conditional; that is, poetry would be like thunder if it conformed to certain conditions. Reading *would* this way leads directly into the line "We both and neither prove" as the reason why poetry and love are like thunder and opens the poem to the possibility of a cognitive metaphor reading of the entire poem as to whether it in fact meets the conditions of being like thunder. The poem then itself becomes a test of whether it fulfills Dickinson's description elsewhere that "True Poems flee - " (A492, Fr1491/J1472/M 618).

A Cognitive Blending Analysis of Dickinson's Poem

We construct meaning by building what Fauconnier has termed "mental spaces," temporary representations that recruit structure from many conceptual domains as well as local context (16ff). The "meaning" that emerges from the mappings of these mental spaces should not be understood as a mental "object" in the mind of the poet that is linguistically transmitted to the mind of the reader. We tend to speak of a poem as though it were a static and permanent object, one that can be "constructed" or "construed." Rather, poetry is an activity undertaken by both writer and reader, the process of accomplishing an intersubjective, shared discourse by recruiting and integrating structures and relationships across multiple mental spaces. The "meaning" of a poem inheres neither in the reader nor in the text. Nor does it reside in the mind of the writer. Meaning is not a mental object that can "reside" anywhere, but an ongoing, dynamic activity, constrained in its scope by the parameters of conceptualization and language. Writing thus involves creating temporary and dynamic mental spaces or representations that "construct" meaning through various processes of composing, identifying, integrating, unpacking, conceptualizing, and so on. Reading involves the same conceptual tasks in "construing" meaning from the text.

As outlined in the introduction, dynamic mental-space mappings in the creation of new meaning consist in 1) projections from certain given domains or "input spaces" that are 2) triggered by what they isomorphically have in common in a "generic" space into 3) a further "blended space" that can produce emergent structure and meaning not present in the original input spaces. Because the process of blending creates new information not initially present in the given input spaces, it is a general model for creativity.

A complex blend refers to the process by which multiple blends create "optimality crossovers" into each other's input spaces when "running" the blend. A poem is also a complex

blend in the sense that its possible interpretations are not always immediately apparent; the reader must actively work to understand the nature and relations of its cross-space connections.

As it proceeds, Dickinson's poem develops a consecutive series of multiple metaphorical mappings. As one metaphor is conceptually grasped and solidified, its emergent structure becomes the reference or presentation space for the next blend, thus reinforcing its iconic representation of the way thunder piles to its climax. Two initial mappings equate the characteristics of 1) thunder with poetry and 2) thunder with love. A third mapping then combines poetry and love as coeval originating activities along with thunder. The fourth mapping is a complex blend of these originating blended spaces. An additional mapping links thunder to God. This mapping then introduces the final complex blend of thunder/poetry/love as iconic manifestations of the force of God. This complex blend opens the poem out to a wider philosophical consideration of the nature of both poetry and love as forces beyond the control of those who experience them, either as agents or recipients, and the poem itself as an icon of divine transcendence.

The brief analysis that follows is the culmination of the many cognitive labyrinthine processes the authors engaged in. The steps of our procedure accord with the classical movements of *oratio*: the level of responding to the spoken word of poetry; *meditatio*: the level of reflecting conceptually on it; and *contemplatio*: the level of experiencing its subliminal affect as we come to understand how the poem reveals itself by what it is doing. To avoid the tedium of describing in detail the many ways in which we circled through the various movements the poem is taking, we summarize them through the following cognitive reading.

The first stanza of the poem creates a metaphorical blend from the two input spaces—thunder in the presentation space and poetry in the reference space—through the acts of piling and

crumbling. It establishes a metaphorical mapping between the actions and consequences of thunder and the possibilities of poetry, according to the preliminary model shown in Figure 2.

[insert Figure 2 here]

Figure 2. Thunder-Poetry blend #1

In metaphorical blending, as Coulson and Matlock note, "metaphor comprehension requires the *transformation* rather than the pure *transfer* of properties from one domain to another" (306). In Figure 2, the abstractions of the generic space indicate the metaphorical nature of the isomorphic relations between thunder and poetry; that is, the physical existence of thunder as a natural force is transformed into the psychological existence of poetry as a human creation. The main structure for the blend is coming from the presentation space of thunder; the only structure provided by the reference space of poetry is the existence of agency and response to its effect.

It is therefore the characteristics of thunder that structure the blend. The mapping creates empty slots that the reader has to fill to flesh out how poetry might act like thunder—thereby focusing on its unbiddable and unpredictable nature and creating some conceptualization of what poetry does, or what the reader understands poetry to do for the speaker of the poem.

In the blend space, poetry is the entity that piles up in the way that thunder does, increasing in power as it manifests, in the same way thunder can arise suddenly and gain in power very quickly. Backward projection from the blend, supported by a mapping of the generic space event structure into the space of poetry, can be used to isolate what the metaphoric equivalents of piling up and crumbling might be in regard to the creative process of poetry. This has the effect of developing and restructuring the poetry space. The process by which this is achieved can be thought of in terms of what Langacker (304-306) calls elaboration sites within the schematic structure, where the reader must attach the equivalent processes as they apply to poetry from the

conceptual schema abstracted from the processes that the thunder is described as undergoing (see McLoughlin). The emergent structure from the blend is therefore the re-imagining of what poetry is and does through the reverse-mapping process to restructure the poetry input space with the equivalent qualities and processes drawn from the actions of poetry as thunder.

Poetry, like thunder, can be experienced but not apprehended. It is not only the reader who experiences poetry. Poetry is often experienced by the poet as an external, intensely motivating force, surging and overtaking, rather than the poet deliberately initiating the process. For both poet and reader, the progression of the poem is both a coming and a going, a climax and an evanescence—a piling and a crumbling "grand away." The crumbling effect when applied to poetry intimates something of its nature as an art. Poetry only truly succeeds when all of its elements work together to achieve its effect. When the constituent parts vie for attention, and become visible as parts, rather than seamlessly working as a unitary whole, a poem fails to achieve its potential power. True poetry is thus transitory, an unbiddable force (as both the piling and the crumbling of thunder is) and beyond the control of the poet.

Poetry too can cause awe in those who experience it, poet or reader. So poetry piles up, and poetry crumbles away, while *everything created hid*. This has the potential to create an emergence where *everything created* might be replaced by the poem "hid[ing]": a "would-be" poem that is yet to emerge through the moving "process" of poetry. It also potentially creates in the thunder space a role for the agent, or "author" of the thunder, while the role for experiencing the effects of the thunder is filled by the entities encapsulated in *everything created*. With these two words, what is easily overlooked here becomes significant later: being in passive mood, they hide the existence of a hidden player: the agent of creation.

At the turn of the poem, a second equivalence is drawn: "Or Love - ". Conceptually, this addition increases the reader's work as thunder itself increases, because all the structures we have created are now duplicated with *love* in the reference space of a new blending complex, relating love to thunder.

[insert Figure 3 here]

Figure 3. Thunder-Love blend #2

The presentation and generic spaces do not change. Only the entity in the reference space changes, so that the emergent structure of the blend has the effect of replacing poetry with love. This allows the blend to run in exactly the same way as the poetry and thunder blend. It takes its structure from the thunder space, and the blend allows for a similar reverse-mapping process to create an emergent restructuring of the love input space linking the equivalents in the domain of love to the actions and processes in the "love as thunder" blend. So again, we apprehend that love can manifest and accrue beyond the control of those who experience it, and it can similarly crumble—evanesce— away.

The succeeding lines in the second stanza draw poetry and love into equivalence through the line "The two coeval come." This creates a third blend space that takes the two previous blends as input spaces to create a mirror blend which allows the emergence of equivalence between poetry and love.

[insert Figure 4 here]

Figure 4. Poetry-Love blend #3

The word *coeval* means that they have the same *date* of origin, but it is also an assertion that the two experiences arise from the same *point* of origin, since conceptually we often create a spatial metaphor for temporal concepts. This spatial aspect is primed by the path-encoding verb *come* that

signifies a deictic movement in both space and time towards the speaker, just as the piling of thunder approaches those who hide. The words can be read as signifying the speaker's belief that poetry and love have the same primeval emotional apparatus or drive that has instinctual roots, as does the action of hiding from thunder. By combining blends we can see that because poetry and love are both made equivalent to thunder, they must also be equivalent to each other.

The sentence *the two coeval come* has two possible readings. Do poetry and love come from a temporally simultaneous point of origin because they operate as thunder does? Or is the statement a parenthetical afterthought that because love is coeval with poetry, it must also act as thunder does, which is the way Miller reads it? If the latter, thunder has been backgrounded or, in Miller's words, is "far from the crescendoing description with which [Dickinson] began." If one adopts the latter reading, the focus of the second stanza switches from thunder to poetry/love, so that the following lines, "We both and / neither prove," refer only to poetry and love, the way it is read by the linguists. Such a reading is complicated by the already enigmatic final two lines of the poem. Either way, the sentence has the effect of circling us back into the poem.

The passive use of *everything created* has the effect of concealing the agent, so that thunder appears as an unbiddable force. In the first two blends, therefore, poetry and love are also unbiddable forces. The emphasis on *this* indicates the poem we are reading, so that both thunder and the poem are the external consequences of some agency and raise the specter of an unnamed player, a force which will be finally revealed in the poem's last line. There is tension in this third blend since both poetry and love are normally conceptualized as having an internal locus of origin while the thunder originates from an external force. However, a sense of being overcome by love or poetry as external forces also exists, as the cultural depictions of eros, with his bow and arrow,

and the muse that visits the poet attest. This dual aspect can also prime the role of "agent" for the

thunder as the blend complex is further proliferated and structured.

At this point in the poem, the whole process is drawn into equivalence (Figure 5).

[insert Figure 5 here]

Figure 5. The Complex Thunder-Love-Poetry blend #4

This blend is further developed as the stanza progresses. "We both and neither prove" is

syntactically puzzling. TL provides several possible readings, concluding that the sentence is a

case of zeugma: using the verb twice with two different meanings. They cite the example of the

answer "Yes and No" to the question "Did Harry attend the lecture?" where *yes* means he was

there and *no* that he wasn't paying attention. In the case of *prove,* they choose to see the difference

as not one of meaning per se but one of form: *prove* being transitive for *neither* and intransitive

for *both.* If, however, it is the meaning of *prove* that changes, the line can be read as "We test both

but can confirm neither" or "We know both and we can define neither." Under these readings, the

line becomes the explanation for why poetry and love would be like thunder if they did what

thunder does.

"We both and / neither prove - ," therefore, can be read as an assertion that, while those

who experience love or poetry can never comprehend the source of their power, the actions that

result from love and poetry, including the poem and acts of care and love for the beloved, are

evidence that they are indeed powerful. So, the proof lies in the effect of love or poetry on others,

not in the internal experience of them. The experiencer can never prove what they are experiencing

is love or poetry from internal experience alone. The proof may exist in the external effects that

result, much as thunder is experienced, not from the electrical and atmospheric forces that make it

up, but through the effects of the wave that it generates on the sensory, motor, and emotive features of sensate cognition.

The lines that follow may be read as an instruction to the self of the speaking voice of the poem or to the reader of the poem (or both) to "Experience either / and consume - ". An initial reading of "consume" in this instance can be transitive, that we should consume poetry and love, but the intransitive reading, that we should be consumed in the act of experiencing them, is also possible, as the linguists note. The verb *consume*, however, can also be a case of the middle voice, whereby both agent and patient are the same. The verb *hide* is an example; one can hide something (transitive), but one can also hide oneself (middle voice), as it is used in the poem. An obsolete meaning of the verb *consume* indicates that this form was once also constructive (associated etymologically with consummate, completion) as well as destructive: "In English, the confusion, which we originally received from Fr. [*French*], was rectified at the Revival of Learning in the 16th c[entury]." (*OED*). This raises the question of which of the several verbs in Hebrew for the English term *consume* was used in the relevant Exodus (33:20) passage in the King James Bible, completed in 1611. Emmylou Grosser, a Biblical Hebrew scholar, identified the word as *kalah*, whose possible meanings indeed include the more constructive interpretations of completion and accomplishment (personal correspondence).

Many of Dickinson's poems compare the idea of the perfecting of life through poetry and love with the completion of life, such as *Till Death - is narrow Loving* - (H211, Fr831/J907/M 409). This helps clarify the TL comment that "if we experienced both in their entirety, we would perish. This is parallel to seeing God, since no one may see God and live." (23) But it is not a parallel insofar as it is a consummation of our experience of the forces of either poetry or love. The ambiguities among the verb's functions offer the potential for a further blended set of actions:

that we should be so immersed in poetry and love, that we are consumed by them, as we consume

their effects (the poem and various manifestations and acts of love), so as to consume ourselves,

in the sense of using up our life force in their pursuit. This blended meaning grounds the closing

assertion of the poem in a particularly resonant way, based on an additional complex mapping

between God and thunder that underlies the final blend that establishes the poem itself as fulfilling

its purposes, what it set out to do (Figure 6).

[insert Figure 6 here]

Figure 6. Thunder-God blend #5

Why does Dickinson choose thunder as the governing metaphor in this poem for poetry

and love and not, for instance, volcanic eruption or earthquake? Cultural evidence provides insight

into what the poem is doing beyond the language of the poem itself. Volcanic eruptions and

earthquakes tend to be considered as natural forces, whereas thunder is an archetypal trope in

mythologies around the world, linking it to divine forces. Jove's crack of lightning and Eros's

arrow both strike and pierce the body, as poetry and love do. In his *Nova Scientia*, the eighteenth-

century Giambattista Vico notes that for early humans, Jove *is* thunder. By seeking shelter in caves

from the dangerous effects of thunderstorms, they were hiding from the face of God. In the King

James version of the Old Testament, this idea is expressed in Exodus 33:20 when God says to

Moses who had asked him "shew me thy glory" (33:18): "Thou canst not see my face: for there

no man shall see me, and live." Because Moses had found grace in God's sight, God arranged for

him to stand in a rock cleft, covering Moses with His hand while He passed by: "And I will take

away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen" (33:23). These

statements appear to contradict the passage where Jacob says: "I have seen God face to face, and

my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30). On many occasions, Moses and God speak "face to face"

(e.g. Exodus 33:11). Biblical exegesis explains that the word *face* in Hebrew is *panim*, which, when applied to God, can mean "presence."[11] So, in the expression "face to face," the word is used as a zeugma, like Dickinson's *prove,* meaning "face" when applied to Moses but "presence" when applied to God. Whenever God accompanies the Israelites, he covers Himself in a cloud so that He is present but not seen. The cloud thus becomes a manifestation—an icon—of God's presence.[12]

Dickinson was well aware of the Biblical admonition, as noted in the following poem:[13]

No man saw awe, nor to his house

Admitted he a man

Though by his awful residence

Has human nature been.

Not deeming of his dread abode

Till laboring to flee

A grasp on comprehension laid

Detained vitality.

Returning is a different route

The Spirit could not show

For breathing is the only work

To be enacted now.

"Am not consumed," old Moses wrote,

"Yet saw Him face to face" -

That very physiognomy

I am convinced was this

(transcr. A295a, Fr1342B/J1733/M 661)

Here, "awe" stands for God, and, having been banished from his presence, humankind can only hope to approximate comprehension of the divine by a "different route," since full knowledge can only occur through death. And yet God is everywhere in creation. Throughout Dickinson's poetry, humankind is portrayed as being unable to "define the Divine" in the world (H160, Fr849/J797/M 390), and yet it can be "witnessed - not explained - " (H154, Fr627/J593/M 308). If we could explain the divine, then we would no longer be human. The implication of the metaphorical mapping of thunder with poetry and love is that they both have the capacity that "Instructs to the Divine" (A87-7/8, Fr969/J867/M 448). That is, they enable us, like old Moses, to see and yet not see at the same time, to have an intimation of the divine presence in all creation; in other words, to recognize what we otherwise cannot define as an icon of the divine nature.

Miller identifies the word *experience* as a warning or command. Modern interpretations of this verb tend to assume it means anything we encounter. But Dickinson's Webster's dictionary has as its first meaning "To try by use, by suffering or by enjoyment."[14] Note that these three nouns refer to doing by action and the subliminal features of negative and positive emotive responses. In the poem, *experience* can refer both to the poet and the reader, and be a hypothetical conditional paralleling the *would be* of the first stanza, so that it is in the act of practicing poetry and love that we are able to move toward the "perfected Life," as in *The Props assist the House* (H122, Fr729*A*/J1142/M 365).

This reading is the more powerful because it elaborates our blend complex through a further set of equivalencies: poetry and love are no longer just forces, but divine forces, and because of this elaboration we can make the association of thunder as a manifestation of the divine in action. Just as thunder is generated from within God's divine power, so is the poem generated from the experience of poetry and love arising from within both poet and reader. We thus arrive at our final conceptual blend.

[insert Figure 7 here]

Figure 7. God-Poetry-Love blend #6

Having elaborated the initial presentation space in this way, and given that the presentation space provides the conceptual structure for the blend complex, we can further see poetry and love as the means by which we may access the divine, as well as the means by which the divine may act on us. The power we experience, in poetry, in love, and in apprehension of the divine, inspires and overtakes us, leaving us awestruck, but also aware of our own lack of control over these forces. Thunder, poetry, and love thus become the manifestation of God's presence without being seen or understood. True poetry works as an icon of the "something else" that is beyond human apprehension.

Conclusion

Our cognitive approach has allowed us to understand how the different literary and linguistic readings were constructed as well as our own reading. By documenting the way the basic metaphors in the poem build through complex blend structures, we have been able to clarify how the literary and linguistic readings of the poem cohere and where they are less explicit in capturing the poem's workings and thereby suggest rather than show. Furthermore, Dickinson's choice of

"thunder" to serve as the source for the workings of poetry and love offers insights into her theory of poetry that a poem "Instructs to the Divine."

A cognitive approach also draws direct connections between a poem's prosody and its topic. For instance, as we have seen, the penultimate lines of each stanza are connected, with the need to hide from thunder related to the danger of directly experiencing the divine power of poetry and love. Just as we would be consumed by the fires of lightning, so we would be consumed if we saw God by experiencing the divine forces of either. So poetry and love "would" be true if they served to enable us to feel the divine force of God's presence without observing it. And that's what this poem does, at the same time as it enables us to comprehend and describe the workings of the poem as an entity with affective power on both poet and reader.

Dickinson's description of the creative cognitive processes of poetry and love in this poem reflect the cognitive processes by which we perceive the world, as the poem enacts what it describes. Since God is present in all creation, all aspects of nature can be signs of the divine nature, as Puritan natural typology indicates (Edwards, *passim*). Such an understanding can be seen in Dickinson's poem regarding the nature of poetry:

> To see the Summer
>
> Sky
>
> Is Poetry, though
>
> never in a Book
>
> it lie -
>
> True Poems flee -
>
> (A 492, Fr1491/J1472/M 618)

It is the same process W. Somerset Maugham describes in responding to the light of early morning and sunset on water:

> You hold your breath, for you cannot believe that such an effect can be anything but evanescent. You watch it with the same expectancy with which you read a poem in some complicated metre when your ear awaits the long delayed rhyme that will fulfil the harmony. But at sunset, [...] the assault on your senses is shattering. You try to guard yourself by saying it is not real. This is not a beauty that steals upon you unawares, that flatters and soothes your bruised spirit; this is not a beauty that you can hold in your hand and call your own and put in its place among familiar beauties that you know: it is a beauty that batters you and stuns you and leaves you breathless; there is no calmness in it nor control; it is like a fire that on a sudden consumes you, and you are left shaken and bare and yet by a strange miracle alive. (32)

That is the effect Dickinson captures in her poem on the consuming power of both poetry and love.

Notes

1. Various terminology has been used for the input spaces in metaphor. Fauconnier and Turner replace the traditional "vehicle" and "tenor" with "source" and "target." The cognitive semiotician Per Aage Brandt names them as "presentation" and "reference," the terminology we adopt here.

2. Citations for the poem are given in quotes unless such quotation would necessitate providing capitalization, line breaks, and punctuation markings, in which case we render them in italics.

3. The Dickinson interdisciplinary project is part of the Collaborative Research Centre, "The Construction of Meaning," funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) at the University of Tübingen since 2009.

4. Sponsored by the Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts (myrifield.org), and now in its fifteenth season, the Emily Dickinson Reading Circle is open to the public and meets monthly in Heath, Massachusetts. Its members represent diverse fields, such as business, law, education, church, psychotherapy, and so on. They include poets, artists, and musicians. What unites them is a love and interest in Emily Dickinson's poetry.

5. Meeting held at Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts, Friday, September 18, 2020. The number participating was restricted to six because of the coronavirus crisis. I am grateful to Esther Haskell, Bari Jarrett, Mary Clare Powell, and Anne and Patrick Williamson for their contributions to the discussion.

6. The logical symbolic representations for the various syntactic parsings given for each sentence have been omitted for the sake of clarity.

7. Iconicity is being increasingly recognized in language expressions that mimic their references. The concept of *mimesis* tends to be translated into English as copy or imitation. Neither capture the active process of simulating; that is, in this example, the metaphorical transformation of meaning between the "piling up" of lines one on top of another and the increasing occurrences of thunder "piling to its close." Also see Freeman.

8. The relations are chiasmic in VP-NP :: NP-VP order as follows: pile-thunder :: (thunder)-*crumble*; *would be-poetry-love :: the two coeval come*.

9. Consonant pairs occur when the placement of articulation in the mouth is the same, so that the only difference between them is whether they are pronounced with the larynx (voice box) open to

allow air freely through (unvoiced) or when friction occurs with air forced through the closed larynx (voiced).

10. Consider the sentence "To wear masks and maintain social distance during the coronavirus pandemic would be safe and wise" and its alternative: "To wear masks and maintain social distance during the coronavirus pandemic — *That* would be safe and wise." *That* provides affective emphasis to the otherwise neutrally loaded statement. While using "*This*" would be grammatically acceptable, it does not have the force *"That"* does.

11. Several translations of *panim* can be found here: https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6440.htm.

12. See also Margaret H. Freeman, *The Poem as Icon: A Study in Aesthetic Cognition.*

13. The poem exists in transcript only. However, a manuscript fragment exists for lines 4-5 as follows: "Has Human Nature gone - / Unknowing of his dread abode - " (Fr1342A).

14. Dickinson's Webster's dictionary can be found here: https://edl.byu.edu/

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